World Chronicle

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Human Development Report
United Nations Development Programme

JOURNALIST: Betsy Pisik, The Washington Times
Bill Reilly, United Press International

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HUMAN DEVELOPMENT REPORT

This year's Human Development Report is about how people can create and use technology to improve their lives. It is also about forging new public policies to lead the revolutions in information and communications technology and biotechnology in the direction of human development. In this edition of **World Chronicle,** UNDP's Sakiko Fukuda-Parr, the lead author of the 2001 Human Development Report, talks about the relationship between technology and socio-economic development.

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ANNOUNCER: From United Nations Headquarters in New York, this is **World Chronicle**, an unedited interview programme about major global issues.

Here now to introduce our guest is the host of today's **World Chronicle**.

LITTLEJOHNS: I'm Michael Littlejohns, and this is **World Chronicle**.

High technology can be a valuable tool for development in poor countries, according to the United Nations Human Development Report. The recently released annual assessment by the U.N. Development Programme offered the conclusion that, contrary to widespread views, poor countries can participate in the new economy with relatively modest investment in education, information technology and health care. It said that countries failing to make such an investment will continue to fall behind in their economic and social well being.

Our guest today is the lead author of this year's Human Development Report. She is Sakiko Fukuda-Parr from the United Nations Development Programme.

Joining me to talk to Ms. Fukuda-Parr are Betsy Pisik of *The Washington Times* and Bill Reilly of *United Press International.*

Ms. Fukuda-Parr, welcome to **World Chronicle.**

You guys in UNDP who prepared this Human Development Report every year, evidently don't shirk from controversy. One of the things which many of us in the media picked up in the latest Report was the issue of genetically modified foods – so-called Frankenstein Foods. In Europe, as you know, there's quite a fuss about the use of genetically-modified foods and to some extent in the United States. Now you guys seem to think that everything is fine and perhaps the fears about GM's as it is called or GMO, adding the word organisms are exaggerated.

FUKUDA-PARR: No, I won't quite say it like that. I think we have to take three steps back and realize that the whole debate about GMO's is taken in this aura of irrationality and extremism. Just the term that you used, you know Frankenstein foods, I think is evidence of that and we have to take a more rational approach to this and we have to think about the risks the environmental risks, the health risks, but more importantly, the socio-economic risks many of the people concerned with the spread of GMO's in fact are concerned with the corporate ownership of this technology and I think we need to really take a step back and look at the potential benefits of this technology for assuring food security of people who actually currently don't have that access.

LITTLEJOHNS: So are you saying that UNDP is taking the side of the corporations by permitting GMO?

FUKUDA-PARR: On the contrary, we are taking a what we would call a third way, you know. The debate is characterized as being either totally pro-GMO and pro-corporation or being defending the interests of poor farmers. We are trying to argue that there is a third way which is that you can use technology and have it owned in such a way that it benefits poor people.

LITTLEJOHNS: Okay, benefit poor people as you put by feeding them, but if you feed them and at the same time hung a bunch of diseases on them, that's not such a good idea.

FUKUDA-PARR: No it's not. I think we should think about feeding them. I think it's really a question of raising the productivity of small farmers in developing countries. I mean all farmers, whether you're in North America, Europe, India, Nigeria, need productive seeds and productive technology and this is the way that agriculture progress has taken place over the years. GMO is just a new technology that gives you that extra potential to tackle problems that old science could not tackle.

LITTLEJOHNS: What about the environmental impact. Surely the UN Environment Programme must be a bit interested in that. There have been reports that the Monarch Butterflies, for example, has been decimated by genetically modified corn??? I think.

FUKUDA-PARR: I think you have to think about the environmental impact of new varieties, of new species, of new plants, each in his own location, case by case, whether it's a genetically modified plant or just conventionally bred variety or developed variety of rose bush, for example. I mean you'll always get some sort of an environmental impact and what kind of an environmental consequence it has I think it's something that vary locations specific and specific to the which you're dealing with.

LITTLEJOHNS: And do you favor square tomatoes?

PISIK: I had to follow up on that, actually. UNDP or UN Environmental Programme or another agency have some kind of obligation to check out the environmental impact of the new plant or even perhaps more rationally a genetically modified plant before it's put into a specific region. What sort of work or research is going on there?

FUKUDA-PARR: I think one of the – what we would like to emphasize is that the management of risk is something that requires the capacity of developing countries. So

scientifically, this has to be done everywhere. But more importantly, I think when we're thinking about technology development or technology development, what we need to do is to also focus on the management capacity in developing countries and really productively help developing countries develop systems – institutions, policies systems, regulatory frameworks, and so forth for risk assessment and risk management.

PISIK: So it's like you think a lot of the outcry about these modified foods are over-blown?

FUKUDA-PARR: No, not at all. I think the outcries are perfectly legitimate. But I think we have to go beyond the outcries and we have to think positively about how some of the negative risks can be managed. We all know that all technology involves some sort of risks every time we get on – in getting a car, get on an airplane, plan to sea, you know, we are taking some sort of a risk and I think we have to have the same approach with GMO – recognize that there is risk, recognize that you have to invest in risk management.

REILLY: In changing your thinking or deliberating changing your thinking in regards to GMO's, have you taken into account the recent mad cow scare in Europe particularly, the BSE – has that entered into your consideration?

FUKUDA-PARR: That I think also shows that how important it is that we have the institutional mechanisms and accountability of people in positions of authority to act responsibly in managing technology. I think technology is something that in today's world is driven by the market and I think this is what really marriage between the market and science is what technological development is all about. And that technological development has tremendous benefits for society for people, you know, and certainly for businesses to make a lot of profit. But for this to be a socially-responsible type of technology development, you really need some sort of social policies with respect to risks, with respect to priorities for what kind of technology you invest in and one of the things that we're really arguing very strongly here is it is all very well for the market to invest in technologies for, let's say, GMO's for square tomatoes. But it's actually more socially beneficial for technology to be developed for farmers who need a more drought-resistant variety of weed, or indeed mace or sorghum, people who have not really benefited from previous years of technological progress.

LITTLEJOHNS: Well let's not beat GMO's into the ground so just go on to something else. Another area of controversy I guess is your ranking of countries you choose among 162 countries, I believe ...

FUKUDA-PARR: Seventy-four.

LITTLEJOHNS: A hundred seventy four now?

FUKUDA-PARR: Oh sixty two, I beg your pardon. It's sixty-two this year.

LITTLEJOHNS: ... to decide which is the top of the heap so to speak and no way is the top of the heap in the latest report and the United States has dropped to six and I think Canada, which for several years was the leader, was also displaced by Norway. Now how do you arrive at this conclusion?

FUKUDA-PARR: Well, you know the Human Development Index that you are referring to, has really a purpose and that purpose is to get policy makers to divert its attention from looking at economic growth figures to looking at human well being figures in thinking about development policies and so this ranking of countries looks at essential aspects of human development – human well being – around the world and these are fairly complex theoretical framework which I won't bore you with, but it's the index is made up of literacy, survival, that is life expectancy, school enrolment and income – it's actually adjusted income. And so it's calculated to show the average progress of countries in these three very basic dimensions of human progress and I think when you realize in certain countries life expectancy is still less than fifty percent of the Arab population cannot read or write in this day and age. I think these are pretty fundamental indicators particularly for poor countries. Now of course people are interested at the top end of this listing. I'm not really sure how relevant it is. Whether it's Canada or Norway, that's number one because the difference between these two countries is really pretty tiny.

LITTLEJOHNS: Do countries complain when they are displaced by somebody else? I mean the United States to drop to six – it really must ....

FUKUDA-PARR: Yes, but nobody has actually dropped. It's just that they've been overtaken by others. So it's like a marathon racing which you have kept your old record but others have broken it.

LITTLEJOHNS: Of course Norway has a big advantage in the fact that it's free homogenous society so they don't have a lot of the racial problems and on some other countries have including Canada. Isn't that the case?

FUKUDA-PARR: Yes, that's true.

LITTLEJOHNS: It's also very highly taxed, I don't know whether that's .... Betsy?

PISIK: I'm curious. You just threw out one of those startling statistics that the UN is great with – fifty percent adults can't read or write. What can technology do? What can a technology investment benefit people that can't read or write?

FUKUDA-PARR: Well, I think that these two things are quite separate issues. You know, I mean I think that obviously technology is something that can help induce about everything on human activity. So technology is an input into improving your education system and there are many, many examples of countries that are using computers, for example, to help with their literacy systems. With the schooling and I think – I have children they go to school in this country. They are far from being illiterate. On the other hand, when nursery school children aged four, five, six, are learning to use the computer before they can read or write and that all help in this whole process of education.

LITTLEJOHNS: This is World Chronicle. Our guest is the lead author of this years' Human Development Report. She is Sakiku Fukuda Parr from the United Nations Development Programme. Bill Reilly.

REILLY: Thank you. I'd like to ask how many authors are involved in this telephone book size report before I get to a serious question.

FUKUDA-PARR: It's a very thin telephone size – book size I think of it – small town, not the yellow pages of Manhattan. I think we're very lucky in the way that we are able to mobilize layers of authors. When you say how many authors, it's very difficult to say because so many people really contribute to it. It's not something that's written in an ivory tower by one or two people. It's something in which we get many, many contributions. For example you have a mini village size telephone book.

LITTLEJOHNS: What makes you think it's such a big telephone book?

FUKUDA-PARR: It's a hundred pages of statistics of hundred and sixty two countries of the world. We get all of these from all of the UN agencies. It's not as if we're going around one hundred sixty countries collecting data and doing that. We also have many consultations

with specialists in these areas in many parts of the world and now with a little bit of new technologies and fantastic power of the Internet, we get massive amounts of ideas, information, data, case studies from all over the world. And then of course we have panels of advisers who meet and look at texts and we have specialists who write background papers, and so forth. It's a structured team of many people who provide all kinds of inputs to this report.

LITTLEJOHNS: Bill you wanted to ask another question didn't you?

REILLY: Yes. This report has been out now for quite a while. It said that most countries were not on track to meet the millennium goal of 2015 to halve the poverty rates – will you explain to us what the poverty rate is and what is considered the poverty level and has there been any change since this report came out?

FUKUDA-PARR: The Millennium Declaration goal is to halve the number of people living in extreme poverty and fortunately, in terms of the populations of the world – in fact there is a large portion of the populations living in countries that seem to be reaching that goal but that's essentially because some very large countries, namely India and China, are on track to meeting those goals and that is of course China and India with over two billion people in total out of every three or four billion in developing world. I think that when you look at the progress made in improving human lives in development poverty reduction in the last thirty years, you see a tremendous progress in areas such as education and health and in fact throughout all of the countries of the world, virtually you have seen this progress. On the other hand, when we talk about poverty there it refers to incomes and that has been very much an uneven trend over the last thirty years also over the last ten years since the report has come out in 1990 and what you notice is that there is a tremendous variations in performance between developing countries that – for example, most countries of East Asia have seen their incomes per capita increase very rapidly. They have seen the numbers of people living under the minimum income level of a dollar a day, which is the international accepted standard, but in Latin America it's been very uneven – up and down, up and down. The number of people in proportion of people living under a dollar a dollar has actually increased.

LITTLEJOHNS: Ms. Fukuda-Parr you seem to want to computerize the developing countries yet your report says that about a billion people don't even have electricity. Aren't you a bit ahead of yourselves or you...

FUKUDA-PARR: In fact two billion ...

LITTLEJOHNS: I stand corrected. That makes it even more strange that you want to computerize.

FUKUDA-PARR: I think it depends on how much you believe that people who do not have bicycles do not deserve a car. We're in the twenty-first century and there is this great array of things available that can improve human lives and I think all people deserve to have a chance to enjoy the ...

LITTLEJOHNS: But how are they going to have a chance if they don't have electricity. I mean, most computers unless they're battery operated and God knows batteries don't last very long and they're also quite expensive. So how are you going to solve that problem?

FUKUDA-PARR: First of all, I think people need both electricity and computers. Second of all, I think we should think about inventing technology that is actually suited to the conditions of the developing countries themselves. So there is very interesting how much dynamism in fact there is in the developing world for developing computers that work on batteries rather than on ...

LITTLEJOHNS: Batteries not included.

FUKUDA-PARR: — that are solar energy driven, that are wireless, that have special software so that they are accessible to people who do not know how to read and write. If human ingenuity can develop computers and can make them work faster at a rate of doubling computing power every eighteen months. Then that same kind of ingenuity can surely be applied to developing computers that will work in places where there is no electricity. And I think this is the kind of thinking we need to ...

LITTLEJOHNS: Well, we could have solar of course and windows – Betsy?

PISIK: I'm actually dying to ask you how far off we are on a solar-powered computer but actually that kind of raise a question also I wanted to ask you about. In terms of intellectual property rights, we hear a lot about that, WTO members were saying they need the strongest possible protections and then we see a counter example like the AIDS drugs that are being locally manufactured. What is the right level? Is there a balance? Is there a way to manipulate that for maximum benefit? Where do you think to go?

FUKUDA-PARR: Well I think of it in terms of not just sort of level – you're right, I think it's a kind of a balance in that. But I think that we have to say that there are certain things that are basically of universal public interest that are of social like the related human rights where

we need to develop rules that will not undermine them. So you need to have safeguards. It's not a question of having the same kind of intellectual property rights protection for HIV/AIDS drugs that are life-saving versus boldness cures. I mean, you can have a strong intellectual property protection on your hair bum as you want and then you won't make any difference if you like to poor people or to well progress to humanity. But I think it's a different thing when you're talking about life-saving drugs.

PISIK: And to apply that to computers and technology along those lines, do you see some benefit to relaxing or increasing those rules – those laws?

FUKUDA-PARR: Well, different sectors have different intellectual property rights constraints. In the area of intellectual property ...

LITTLEJOHNS: It is copyright you are talking about, right?

FUKUDA-PARR: And patents. You know some people are saying that certain kinds of intellectual property rights can actually constrain innovation. I think what is in the public interest really is to have the kind of system that promotes innovation. Because that's what we all benefit from because let's face it, intellectual property rights is basically a monopolistic kind of thing. It's an anti-free market device. So what you want to do is to intervene in such a way for the public good. And what is in the public good – what is in public interest – is actually that it is a device for promoting innovation and scientific creativity. So I think with all of these you have to make sure it doesn't get too far and even corporations in the technology areas are saying that certain kinds of intellectual property on business processes, for example, can actually discourage innovation.

REILLY: Would you be able to list a few of the countries and match them up with technology needs they need?

FUKUDA-PARR: Can you explain your question?

REILLY: What countries would need what technology?

FUKUDA-PARR: Well, I think, what we are facing is the great gap between need and technological development between the great concentration of investment and technology and technological development. You know that in the developed world and a gap – the great shortage of technological development for poverty reduction to tackle the sort of the basic problems in areas of medicine and agriculture and sorry to come back to agriculture again, but ninety percent of R&D in the health field is going to diseases, and so forth. That is not in the

top ten percent of the priorities so you also find that the over thousand new drugs that have been marketed in the last ten years, out of those, only thirteen are something for tropical diseases that afflict the vast majority of the world's population.

LITTLEJOHNS: Ninety percent, I think you said in your book.

FUKUDA-PARR: Yes. So there is this miss-match between poverty need and needs of the poor and where the money is going. Of course, it's not surprising, after all this is all market-driven investments. There's nothing wrong with that. It's just that we have to fill that other gap.

LITTLEJOHNS: We have only a very few seconds left. Would you say that the Human Development Report achieved these goals?

FUKUDA-PARR: Yes, it is after all only a report written by a handful of people with all these inputs from all these others. But I think what has happened in the last ten years is that nobody would say today that education and health are not important for poor people.

LITTLEJOHNS: Ms. Fukuda-Parr, that's all the time we have. Thank you for being with us on this edition of **World Chronicle**.

Our guest has been the lead author of this year's Human Development Report. She is Sakiko Fukuda-Parr from the United Nations Development Programme. She was interviewed by Betsy Pisil of *The Washington Times* and Bill Reilly of *United Press International*.

I'm Michael Littlejohns. Thank you for joining us. We invite you to be with us for the next edition of **World Chronicle**.

ANNOUNCER: Transcripts of the programme may be obtained free of charge by sending a stamped, self-addressed envelope to **World Chronicle**, United Nations, Room S-827L, New York, N.Y., 10017.

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